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## Extension of the Natural Range of Two Mammals in Clay County, Kansas

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The north-western part of Clay County was settled mainly in the years 1869 to 1871, and before 1872 there was little broken prairie on the upland. In the early days there were large mammals which are now either extinct or very rare, like the beaver and members of the deer family. Some mammals, however, not only hold their own but are actually more numerous in the present civilized environment than formerly. Among these is the jack rabbit. The coyote would be in the same category were it not for the continuous efforts being made for its extermination by special bounties, wolf-hunts, and the like.

Two mammals are now in the region which entirely unknown in the early days, the prairie dog, (*Cynomys ludovicianus* Ord.) which originally did not extend eastward much if at all beyond Concordia, and the opossum (*Didelphys virginiana* Shaw).

The prairie-dog is a short-grass animal. The development of well grazed pastures, the constant increase of the buffalo grass and the mesquite grasses and the grazing down of the tall *Andropogons*, have extended the ideal conditions for the home life of the prairie-dog to the eastward. A large colony of prairie-dogs was started about twenty years ago in a large pasture in Bloom township, just west of a farm owned by the writer. This dog town is on Section 12, town 7, range 1 east. The prairie-dogs spread for half a mile in spite of desultory attempts to eradicate them. They moved southeast from the original center down a long slope and a large ravine, until, at the end of the pasture they came to the tall grass *Andropogon furcatus* Muhl., on the writer's farm which was not pastured (Section 7, town 7, range 2 east). They stopped short here and for years never invaded it although they spread northward along the pasture fence for a third of a mile. Occasionally some adventurous pioneer would move across into the edge of the long grass, dig a hole, and make a small clearing, but invariably this site was abandoned to the great relief of the writer who watched this performance for ten years. In the meantime the "dogs" did not hesitate to mow off several acres of small grain each year to the south. Recently, in 1923, a determined attempt was made to exterminate the "town" and in the summer of 1924 only a few of the hundreds of mounds which had living inhabitants remained. The writer was also informed by competent persons that prairie-dogs had invaded some of the large pastures farther south in the county. But the writer did not see these.

The opossum is now quite common all through the region while in the early years the writer never heard of one being seen, although

racoons and badgers were frequently taken by him and others. Its original range in the region probably did not extend farther than the southeastern part of the county where oaks are still common. The writer long ago heard his father say that the opossum was present in the south eastern part. The progress of the opossum toward the northwest is probably due to the much more certain food supply under civilized conditions. There is corn part of the year, to say nothing of poultry and eggs, especially in the fall and winter when food must have been exceedingly scarce for the opossum in a region where acorns and other nuts and fruits are absent. Unlike the prairie-dog which is sure to be eradicated sooner or later, the opossum will probably enjoy the blessings of civilization for a long time to come.